

From: Dan Rose
To: Microsoft ATR
Date: 1/25/02 5:06pm
Subject: Microsoft Settlement

To whom it may concern,

I am writing to express my dismay -- or more accurately, utter disbelief -- at the Justice Department's proposed settlement in the Microsoft antitrust case. I urge you to reconsider.

The essential problem with the settlement is that it offers no punishment for the years of antitrust violations found by three federal judges. It offers only some weak guidelines for future behavior. This is equivalent to having a trial for a bank robber, finding him guilty, and then sentencing him to being nicer next time he robs a bank.

I have been working with computers and as part of the computer industry for over twenty years. I have been a programmer, a student, a researcher, a manager, and the Chief Technical Officer of a company. I have worked for Fortune 500 companies and 3-person startups. I have a Ph.D. in Computer Science. I have used all sorts of computer operating systems dating back before Windows even existed. I have used the Internet for years, long before the World Wide Web was created. So I think I have a pretty good perspective on how the industry has changed, and what role Microsoft has played in those changes.

Microsoft has portrayed itself, through advertising (as well as a fake letter-writing campaign) as an innovator flourishing in the free market. This simply flies in the face of the facts. Nearly every one of Microsoft's so-called innovations was either purchased from someone else or simply copied. In the latter case, the true innovators were then put out of business through Microsoft's illegal monopolistic practices.

Here are just a few examples, known to even the most casual student of computer history. Which of these innovations came from Microsoft?

MS-DOS, the operating system Microsoft provided for the original IBM PC? No, that was created by Seattle Computer Products. It was originally called QDOS (for "Quick and Dirty Operating System") and was hurriedly bought by Microsoft after Bill Gates learned that IBM needed an operating system for its new PC. Gates told IBM that he had an operating system, then quickly went and bought one.

The spreadsheet? No, that was VisiCalc, invented by Software Arts and later perfected by Lotus's 1-2-3.

The modern word processor? No, there were many others, such as WordPerfect, before Microsoft Word.

The ability to network PCs? No, Novell and Apple did that long before Microsoft.

The graphical user interface? Hardly; SRI, Xerox PARC, and Apple all developed the ideas that Microsoft used in Windows.

The Internet Explorer web browser? No, that was licensed from Spyglass, the company that commercialized the original version of an earlier browser called Mosaic, which was itself developed at a government-funded research center.

In fact, every one of those innovations was invented by another company and was available to consumers before Microsoft was involved. Microsoft's primary contribution to the computer industry has been in putting the true innovators out of business. It's gotten to the point where entrepreneurs avoid certain markets entirely because they fear the wrath of Microsoft.

I am a capitalist, and I believe in the free market. Yet I also believe that when a company tilts the playing field by ignoring the laws that others are following, it must be held accountable. No one can bring back the many companies Microsoft put out of business. But if Microsoft were held financially responsible for the damage it has done, and made to give back its ill-gotten gains, then there would be an explosion of new innovations that would benefit all of us.

Sincerely yours,
Daniel E. Rose